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Argentina

Food and Agricultural Import Regulations and Standards - Narrative

FAIRS Country Report

Approved By:

Dwight Wilder

Prepared By:

Francisco Pirovano

Report Highlights:

This report provides information on regulations and standards for importing U.S. food and beverages into Argentina. In general, Argentina is an import-friendly country with few regulations, which usually are applied consistently, but unexpected changes in current regulations may require additional efforts to ensure that export operations are successful.

Updated on: July 2009

ARGENTINA: FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL IMPORT REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS (FAIRS)

This report was prepared by the Office of Agricultural Affairs of the USDA/Foreign Agricultural Service in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for U.S. exporters of domestic food and agricultural products. While every possible care was taken in the preparation of this report, information provided may not be completely accurate either because policies have changed since its preparation, or because clear and consistent information about these policies was not available. It is highly recommended that U.S. exporters verify the full set of import requirements with their foreign customers, who are normally best equipped to research such matters with local authorities, before any goods are shipped.

**FINAL IMPORT APPROVAL OF ANY PRODUCT IS SUBJECT TO THE
IMPORTING COUNTRY'S RULES AND REGULATIONS AS INTERPRETED BY
BORDER OFFICIALS AT THE TIME OF PRODUCT ENTRY.**

Section I. Food Laws

The Argentine Food Code (*Código Alimentario Argentino* - CAA) regulates local food production and marketing. However, the CAA resolutions are being gradually replaced by Mercosur standards, which are based on the norms of: 1) the European Union; 2) the Codex Alimentarius (Codex); and 3) the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

There are three official entities that regulate sanitary, quality, and stability standards, packaging, and transportation of food products in Argentina. They are as follows:

A. The National Service of Agricultural Food Health and Quality (*Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria* - **SENASA**) handles fresh, chilled, or frozen products and by-products of animal, plant and seafood origin. It also handles canned products containing over 60% animal origin and food preparations containing over 80% animal origin.

B. The National Food Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Alimentos* - **INAL**), regulates processed food products which are prepared for direct human consumption, health supplements, and both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, with the exception of wine.

C. The National Wine Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Vitivinicultura* - **INV**) exercises control over the authenticity of wine and wine products during their production, manufacturing, and marketing stages.

The two first organizations have overlapping responsibilities. FAS recommends that exporters rely on their importers to get their products registered with the appropriate organization.

For processed foods and beverages (except wine), Decree 1812 of September, 1992, established the following:

"... in the case of imported processed foods, the CAA requirements are considered to be met when the products come from the following countries/regions: U.S.A, E.U., New Zealand, Switzerland, and Japan. In all of these cases, the food products should have been manufactured under the same controls as those products destined for human consumption in the domestic market of the country of origin."

Article 8 of Decree 1812 states the following:

"...when there are reasons to presume risks for human, animal or plant health because of the introduction of food products to the country, the three above-mentioned entities (SENASA, INAL, and INV) reserve the right to perform an inspection of the facility previous to the product's entry into Argentina." (Note: Please see Section IX. Import Procedures - Paragraph 2)

Section II. Labeling Requirements

A. General Requirements

Products imported through SENASA (fresh, chilled, or frozen products and by-products of animal, plant and seafood origin): A label must be affixed to the packaging of the imported products. It must include the following information in Spanish:

1. importer's name and address
2. country of origin
3. establishment of origin
4. ingredient declaration
5. temperature range for maintenance requirements
6. minimum durability

Products imported through INAL (processed foods, and alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, except wine): Imported processed foods from the United States can come in their original package. There is no need to translate the labels. The only special requirement is a sticker label affixed to the retail package (no matter the size/volume) containing the following data in Spanish:

1. name and brand of the product
2. identification of origin
3. composition: ingredients and additives in decreasing order of weight
4. net weight or measure
5. lot number
6. expiration date
7. exporter's name and address
8. importer's name and address
9. importer's National Register of Establishment number (RNE)
10. National Register of Food Product number (RNPA)
11. storage, preparation and usage instructions when needed
12. nutritional Information

Products imported through INV (wine): A sticker label should be affixed to each imported bottle of wine, containing the following information in Spanish:

1. brand
2. legal Identification of the product (wine)
3. alcoholic grade
4. net content
5. country of origin
6. acronym and analysis number (granted by the INV)
7. color
8. sugar content (if more than 6 milligrams per liter of sugar)

9. importer's name, address and INV registration number
10. other components other than wine
11. warning statements ("beber con moderación" "Prohibida su venta a menores de 18 años")

All the mandatory statements must be printed in the labels with readable fonts and clear colors which contrast are easily identified by costumers. The legal identification of the product, alcoholic grade, net content, and country of origin may be printed in more than one label only if they are in the same visual camp. Therefore they can be read without having to turn the bottle around. The font size must be larger than 1.5 millimeter and 3 millimeters for alcoholic grade and net content.

Organic Products

Imported products labeled as "organic" must come from a country whose organic standards have been evaluated by SENASA and found to be equivalent to the Argentine regulations on organic production. They must also be certified by any of the Argentine certifying agencies approved by SENASA prior to export.

Biotech Products

There are no labeling requirements for biotech foods in Argentina. Despite the increasing demand for biotech food labeling by international consumer and environmental groups, Argentina does not have a national regulatory system for biotech foods, and none is likely in the near term. Most Argentine legislators believe that the national interest is not served by mandatory labeling legislation.

B. Requirements specific to nutritional labeling

A nutritional fact panel is required in Argentina for imported and domestic food products. At the present time, no nutrient content claims (e.g. "low in saturated fat"), absolute descriptors (e.g. "high-fiber or low fat"), or relative descriptors (e.g. "reduced" sugar or "light" in sodium) are required, approved, or prohibited by the Argentine Government (GOA). However, they are being reviewed under the Mercosur standards. Thus, these claims are analyzed on a case-by-case basis.

Section III. Packaging and Container Regulations

Argentina does not officially have any special packaging or container size requirements or preferences. It is a marketing issue where the consumer determines what type of package/container he/she prefers.

In addition, there are no official municipal waste disposal laws or product recycling regulations that affect imported products.

Section IV. Food Additives Regulations

Argentina uses a positive list of food additives. Article 2 of Decree 2092 of October 1991, states the following:

"... all foods, condiments, beverages, or their raw material and food additives which are manufactured, fractioned, preserved, transported, sold, or exposed, must comply with the CAA requirements. When one of those is imported, the CAA requirements will be applied. The GOA also considers products from countries which have food controls comparable to those of Argentina, or when they use the *Codex Alimentarius (FAO/OMS)* standards, to be in compliance with Argentine standards."

All additives used must be included in the Mercosur positive list of food additives. If the additive in question does not appear on that list, its registration can be requested to INAL. This list varies by product and can be obtained from an importer.

Section V. Pesticides and Other Contaminants

SENASA's resolution 256/03 establishes the Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for products that are traded in the country. The mechanism to set them is as follows: a chemical company that applies for a pesticide to be released in the Argentine market must carry out a two-year study in three different agro-ecological areas of Argentina. The sampling method to be used in these cases is the one that is approved by FAO. Argentina uses the Tolerated Daily Intake (Ingesta Diaria Admisible - in Spanish) suggested by the Codex Alimentarius for the Latin American Region 14 as a reference. The required listed number is generally lower than that suggested by the Codex but higher than that suggested by the EU. If SENASA has doubts about whether the MRL established by the research is right or not, then they use the Codex number.

The current MRL list is the annex of resolution 256/03. It can be accessed on the Internet at www.infoleg.gov.ar and then by typing the number of the resolution on the search field.

Section VI. Other Regulations and Requirements

Before the product is shipped, it must undergo a "pre-shipment inspection" in the country of origin, carried out by an international certification company appointed by the GOA. The GOA's objective is to compare the merchandise shipped with the price paid for it in order to avoid under-billing. These companies have offices in all major U.S. ports. (Note: This procedure only applies to the agricultural and food products included in the following HTS Chapters: 1, 2, 5, 7, 12, 13, 14, and 23).

Health supplements that contain certain ingredients should have a "warning" sign and specific language determined on a case-by-case basis. INAL regulates this requirement according to the CAA. U.S. bar codes can remain on the package, and most retailers make use of them.

Enriched Flour: By Argentine Law § 25.630 and its Decree § 569/2003, all flour-based products must have been manufactured with enriched flour. The required nutrients are as follows:

| Nutrient | Quantity (mg/Kg) |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Iron | 30 |
| Folic Acid | 2.2 |
| Thiamin (Vitamin B1) | 6.3 |
| Riboflavin (Vitamin B2) | 1.3 |
| Niacin | 13.0 |

Diet products that require either more or less of the amounts indicated above are exempted together with those products deemed as organic/ecological/biological by Law § 25127.

Labels must show the content of each nutrient and the legend "Enriched Flour Law § 25630 - Harina Enriquecida Ley N° 25630".

Section VII. Other Specific Standards

Product samples with no commercial value (under US\$100) do not pay import duties. Regular mail should be used. Post recommends exporters coordinate with their importers/agents on this matter.

Section VIII. Copyright and/or Trademark Laws

Argentina has not adhered to the Geneva Pact. Therefore, brands and trademarks have to be registered in Argentina to ensure brand property. Post recommends that any U.S. company that will launch products in the Argentine market should register them. The cost is approximately US\$300 per brand.

Section IX. Import Procedures

Products imported through SENASA (fresh, chilled, or frozen products and by-products of animal and seafood origin): (SENASA Resolution No. 816/02 - available in English upon request). An import permit is required to import products and by-products of animal origin into Argentina. The permit is obtained from SENASA and should be requested by an importer who has already been registered at SENASA and who has registered the facility intending to export to Argentina. The application for the permit must state the following:

1. type of product
2. country of origin
3. name of meat establishment
4. official meat establishment number
5. address of meat establishment
6. essay describing the manufacturing process of the product (endorsed –signed and sealed - by the government of the country of origin)
7. essay on the packaging type listing the materials that will be used. In addition, the packaging must be approved by the appropriate official authority at the country of origin. The certificate should state that the packaging is approved to be in contact with edible products (this primarily applies to canned products)
8. two copies of the original product label to be imported

This permit includes the registration numbers of the importer and product. After the permit is granted and within five (5) days prior to arrival of the product at the Argentine port of entry, the importer must advise SENASA of the arrival of the shipment. During the following fifteen (15) days, the importation must be completed. Only with a strong justification can this time period be extended.

U.S. products and by-products of animal origin can only be imported from U.S. plants approved by the United States Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration, and must be accompanied by an official health certificate. While SENASA accepts products from any FSIS/FDA-approved facility, it reserves the right to prior inspection and approval of the establishments of origin by SENASA, when deemed necessary.

All U.S. meat plants exporting products and by-products of animal origin to Argentina may be audited by SENASA.

On January 22, 2002, SENASA Resolution No. 117 was implemented. This new resolution defines the methodology to be followed for risk assessment of importation of live animals, their reproductive material, and products and by-products of animal origin in relation to Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) occurrence.

Before the BSE case of December 23, 2003 in the state of Washington, the U.S. product

most affected by this resolution was sweetbreads, which were barred from importation into Argentina in January 2002. After the BSE case of December 23, 2003, all imports of live animal products and by-products of ruminant origin were temporarily suspended. USDA and SENASA are working jointly to overcome this issue. In June 2006, the Secretariat of Agriculture of Argentina issued Resolution 315, which aligns Argentine import requirements for material of bovine origin to those in the Zoosanitary Code of the International Organization for Animal Health (OIE). This new Argentine rule exempts U.S. dairy products from the need of a health certificate when exported to Argentina. Other products benefitting from Resolution 315 are bovine genetics.

Processed meat products: The same data apply to processed products such as ham, sausages, canned products, etc. In this case, a full description of the product composition in Spanish is required (i.e. percentage of each of its major ingredients, approved by the official sanitary service).

Fresh, chilled and frozen pork and lamb meat: The United States does not have agreed upon a protocol with Argentina for the importation of these meats.

Products imported through SENASA (products of plant origin): In order to obtain a USDA Phytosanitary Certificate required for all plant products entering into Argentina (which should be signed by an Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service/APHIS *official* inspector, not by an APHIS *state* inspector), the exporter will need to submit an import certificate (AFIDI) to APHIS. This AFIDI can only be obtained from SENASA by the importer in Argentina. The AFIDI will explain in detail all the necessary requirements needed before the product can be exported. Upon arrival in Argentina, SENASA will hold the product at the port of entry for inspection and to verify that it meets all the requirements stated in the AFIDI. SENASA will then issue an import certificate for Customs to release the product.

The AFIDI must state the following:

1. name of product
2. destination
3. origin
4. phytosanitary (health) certificates including additional declarations
5. (for specific information on this certificate, please contact the APHIS Office in Buenos Aires, Juramento 2089, 1428 Buenos Aires, Argentina, phone: 54-11-4706-3819; fax: 54-11-4706-0593; e-mail: yvette.perez@aphis.usda.gov).

Also with plant materials, SENASA only accepts products from APHIS-approved facilities, and it reserves the right to prior inspection and approval of the establishments of origin by a SENASA official, when deemed necessary.

Products imported through INAL (Processed foods, and alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, except wine): Product and importer registration is required prior to importing a product into Argentina. The product must be registered by an importer who has already completed the registration process at INAL. If the product has no problems, its registration

should be ready in less than thirty (30) days. The requirements to register imported processed foods are listed below:

A. A new importer must apply only once for a National Register of Establishment (RNE). The requirements are as follows:

1. letter addressed to the Minister of Public Health
2. registration form
3. customs registration form
4. tax Office (DGI) registration form
5. municipal authorization for the warehouse (cold chambers, for frozen products)
6. approval of partnership of the company
7. payment of fee

B. In order to register the product, the importer along with his RNE must apply for a National Register of Food Product number (RNPA). The requirements are the following:

1. letter addressed to the Minister of Public Health announcing intention to register
2. application form
3. flow chart and assay on the product's manufacturing process and technique, raw materials used, and packaging type
4. original label and three copies
5. complementary label with the data stated under "Section II. Labeling Requirements"; and
6. certificate of free sale and fit for human consumption issued by the sanitary
7. authority of the country (or state) of origin
8. payment of fee

C. Once the RNPA has been issued and the product is in the port, the importer needs to obtain a Certificate of Free Circulation (*Certificado de Libre Circulación*) at INAL. The requirements are listed below:

1. letter requesting a Certificate of Free Circulation for the product/s
2. shipment information
3. copy of the invoice
4. bill of lading
5. copy of the RNE
6. copy of the RNPA
7. manufacturing date and shelf life
8. Free Sale certificate / Fit for Human Consumption certificate / Certificate of Analysis, issued by the Health / Agriculture Department of the country (or state, or county) of origin
9. certificate of aging (for alcoholic beverages, except for wine)

Once the importer has an RNPA, he does not need to apply for a new one every time he imports the product. However, he must request a Certificate of Free Circulation for each

shipment.

In the case of health supplements, items (A), (B), and (C) mentioned above also apply with slight differences. Instead of the RNE, importing establishments need to obtain from INAL a National Register of Establishment of Health Supplements number (RNESD). And instead of the RNPA, a National Register of Health Supplements number (RNSD) is needed. The requirements are as follows:

1. request register authorization at INAL
2. each presentation must be signed by the owner of the product, the local legal representative, and technical director of the local establishment
3. Free Sale Certificate from the country of origin, issued by the national or state sanitary authority, and stamped by the Argentine Consulate.
4. Analysis of the product for verification that it complies with the CAA standards
5. the Argentine importer must have a technical director who will be responsible for: the genuine origin of the product, the legitimacy of the document, the shelf life of the product, the quality control of the shipment, the correct labeling, and the appropriate "warning" literature on each package or promotional material, when required

Products imported through INV (wine):

1. The importer must be registered in the INV.
2. Import Permit issued by the INV (form 1825-O. y M.)
3. The import permit form must come accompanied by a certificate issued by the appropriate official authority of the country of origin, stating its analytical specifications.
4. The product must comply with the limits of analytical composition required by the INV for similar locally manufactured products.
5. The importer must submit an import for domestic consumption document (form OM -1993 SIM)
6. A sticker must be affixed to each bottle (see Section II. Labeling Requirements).

Once the product arrives at the warehouse, the importer must request an analysis and shipment control by the INV. If the analysis is correct, the INV issues a Certificate of Free Circulation. Then, the product is ready to be marketed.

The following is information that U.S. wineries must provide to the Argentine importer:

1. certificate of Country of Origin
2. certificate of Free Sale and Fitness for Human Consumption
3. certificate from the Wine Institute
4. analysis of the product

Appendix I. Government Regulatory Agency Contacts:

Servicio Nacional de Sanidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria (SENASA)
Avda. Paseo Colón 367, piso 5
1063 Buenos Aires, Argentina
Tel: (54-11) 4121-5353
Fax: (54-11) 4121-5153

Instituto Nacional de Alimentos (INAL)
Estados Unidos 25
1101 Buenos Aires, Argentina
Tel: (54-11) 4342-5674; 4340-0800 (ext. 3538)
Fax: (54-11) 4331-6418

Instituto Nacional de Vitivinicultura (INV)
San Martín 430
5500 Mendoza, Argentina
Tel: (54-261) 4496358; 4496359
Fax: (54-261) 4496306.

Appendix II. Other Import Specialist Contacts:

Argentina has only one official laboratory for products of animal origin, which is owned by SENASA. However, there are several other laboratories approved by SENASA and the Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS), U.S. Department of Agriculture. List of approved laboratories may be obtained through the FAS Buenos Aires office, as follows:

Office of Agricultural Affairs
U.S. Embassy, Buenos Aires

Avda. Colombia 4300, C1425GMN Buenos Aires, Argentina
Phone: 54-11-5777-4644, Fax: 54-11-5777-4216
E-mail: agbuenosaires@usda.gov / Homepage: <http://www.fas.usda.gov>